

ORR (Gus. J.)

AN ADDRESS

ON THE

NEEDS OF EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH

BY

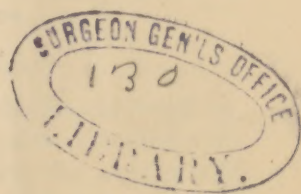
HON. GUSTAVUS J. ORR, LL. D.,

State School Commissioner of Georgia.

DELIVERED BEFORE THE DEPARTMENT OF SUPERINTENDENCE OF THE
NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION,

AT

THE MEETING OF 1879.



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THE NEEDS OF EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH.

Hon. GUSTAVUS J. ORR, LL.D., State school commissioner of Georgia, then read the following paper:

Mr. President and gentlemen of the Department: The subject assigned me, viz, "The needs of education in the South," is a large one, and I fear that I shall not be able to do it justice. To acquire the information necessary to a thorough discussion of it, demanded far more time than that left me by the official duties pressing upon me. I have given it, however, such thought as I could, and I shall endeavor to make the best presentation of it possible under the circumstances. In what I have to say I shall speak with entire candor, and the views presented shall have at least one merit, that of sincerity and honesty. The two sections of our common country never will be able to understand each other properly until their representative men, upon all occasions which may bring them together, shall learn to deal with one another in a spirit of frankness. Liberality is of the essence of learning, and true culture has no more distinctive mark than large heartedness and breadth of views. I found this general statement illustrated in the reception given me by this body twelve months ago, and the manner of my reception then emboldens me to open my heart fully to you now.

EARLY PROVISIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION.

In order to understand the educational needs of the South, it will be necessary to have some understanding of the educational condition of that section, and in order to take this latter fully into the mind it will be necessary to take a rapid review of the history of educational effort in the Southern States from the earliest times down to the late unhappy war. This is the more necessary as the two civilizations (the ante-bellum and post-bellum) are distinct, and to understand the one requires some previous knowledge of the other. The opinion has had wide currency that in educational achievement the South has always been very far behind other sections of the Union. If what I have to say shall have the effect of modifying this opinion I feel that I shall thereby have rendered some service to the cause of truth. At the time the present General Government was formed, five of the original thirteen States forming it were Southern States, viz, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. All of the other Southern States were offshoots from these, and were, in the main, peopled by emigrants from the five

original Southern States. In most of these States provision was early made, either by the State itself, by private individuals incorporated in companies, or by the different religious denominations, and, in some cases, by all of these different agencies, for the higher education, including under that phrase the instruction usually given in academies, high schools, and colleges. I am fully conversant with educational effort in my own State, and as what was done educationally in Georgia in ante-bellum times was almost identical with the educational achievement of every other Southern State, I feel that I cannot better represent the ante-bellum educational work of the South than by going a little into the details of Georgia educational history. Permit me, then, to give a brief educational sketch of my own State. To do this, let me first present succinctly our educational legislation; and first as to the fundamental law: Georgia had before the war three constitutions. The first was adopted in the midst of civil commotion in the year 1777. This made it the duty of the legislature to provide schools for the education of the people. The second, adopted in 1789, contained few specific grants of power and none in respect to education. I find in it, however, this general provision: "The general assembly shall have power to make all laws and ordinances which they shall deem necessary and proper for the good of the State;" and surely this grant is broad enough to cover the most liberal things a legislature could have devised for the promotion of education. The third, adopted in 1798, remained in force till 1861. It contained a grant in respect to education which I shall not quote, but which was always held to be of sufficient amplitude by the friends of liberal educational progress.

Thus much as to the educational provisions of the different constitutions in force during the ante-bellum period. Let us now look hastily into the statutes. Two of these relate to the establishment of a State college or university. One of them, enacted in 1784, donates a large tract of land as an endowment. I have never been able to learn the exact number of acres. Of one thing, however, I am sure: the form of the endowment was early so changed as to make it pay annually the handsome sum of \$8,000 to the support of the college, an annuity which it still enjoys notwithstanding the general destruction of values wrought by the war. The second, enacted in 1785, provided for the organization of the college by creating a board of trustees and a board of visitors, which two boards were to sit together under the title of the *senatus academicus*. This joint board was clothed with large powers and was charged with important duties in respect to general education, the scheme of the act contemplating the establishment of one or more academies in every county in the State, which were to be constituent parts of the college and were to be under the supervision of this *senatus academicus*. The college was not put in operation till about the beginning of the present century, and the grand conception in respect to the county academies never was carried fully into effect. It evidently continued long to be

cherished, however, for an act was passed in 1821 appropriating \$250,000 to be invested permanently, the annual proceeds of which were to be applied to the support of these county academies.

Thus much in reference to the laws providing for higher education by the State. About the year 1835 there was a great awakening among the religious denominations in Georgia upon the subject of the higher education. During that year Oglethorpe University, an institution under the patronage of the Presbyterians, was incorporated. The next year two other colleges came into existence—Mercer University, endowed by the Baptists, and Emory College, an institution under the charge of the Methodist Church. In order to exhibit the ante-bellum work of these institutions, State and denominational, I give the following statistics, which are taken from their respective catalogues:

Number of ante-bellum alumni.

University of Georgia	928
Oglethorpe University	280
Mercer University	229
Emory College	397
Total	1,834

These four institutions gave a partial education during the same period, no doubt, to at least twice the number of alumni enrolled in their respective catalogues, the recipients having been compelled, by various causes, to relinquish their studies before the completion of the college curriculum. They thus gave to their country over 5,500 men, more or less fully equipped for the great battle of life. I have looked carefully over their lists of alumni; and among them I find men who have filled with honor high places in all the departments—legislative, executive, and judicial—of the national and of their respective State governments; men who have shed lustre upon the learned professions of law, medicine, and theology; men who have added to the domain of science by discovery; men who have been an ornament to authorship in the fields both of science and literature; men who have been honored and successful teachers of youth, and men who have adorned the walks of private life. The numerous county academies, too, though not supported by the bounty of the State according to the original design of the fathers (receiving, nevertheless, from time to time, small contributions in the way of aid from the public fund), were enabled, through the proceeds of tuition fees, to contribute to society every year throughout the ante-bellum period large numbers of persons of both sexes with respectable academic attainments. Who will dare to rise up for the purpose of undervaluing this great educational work?

Great attention was also given in Georgia, during the same period, to the higher education of females. In 1836 endeavor in this direction received its first great impulse by the chartering of the Georgia Female

College, now known as the Wesleyan Female College, an institution under the control of the Methodist Church. This was the first college in the United States, and perhaps in the world, to have the right given it of conferring degrees on women. This mother of female colleges sent forth, in ante-bellum times, bearing her diploma 456 alumnae to adorn and elevate and bless society. The founding of other similar institutions followed in rapid succession till the number rose to nearly twenty. I cannot give the number of alumnae of any of these, as the necessary data have not been within my reach. I can, however, make this statement, that I once had occasion to make some investigations upon this subject before the recent war, and I satisfied myself that there were, at that time, in actual attendance upon these higher institutions for the education of women in Georgia upward of sixteen hundred pupils.

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN GEORGIA BEFORE THE WAR.

What shall I now say of elementary education? I am well aware that I now approach much the weakest point in our system. By elementary schools I mean schools in which were taught spelling, reading, penmanship, arithmetic, and sometimes English grammar and geography. Schools of this grade were the sole reliance throughout the rural districts in my State for many long years. The men who taught them were often incompetent—being sometimes without natural capacity, attainments, or aspirations—and now and then even persons of bad morals. There were among them no teachers' institutes or associations, no circulating libraries, no educational periodicals—in short, nothing approaching the modern appliances provided with a view to professional elevation. There was no examination of teachers, no issuing of license as a condition precedent to obtaining a school, and no supervision. Every teacher was isolated, entirely dependent upon his own ability to modify methods or originate better ones, and completely and absolutely independent in the little realm over which he held sway. The obtaining of a school was entirely a matter of contract between the person offering himself as teacher and his proposed patrons. The latter were often utterly incompetent to judge of the teacher's qualifications, and hinged their acceptance or rejection of him solely upon the rates at which he offered his services. A vivid picture of one of the more harmless of this class of "old field school-masters," as they were called, is drawn in the person of Michael St. John, in the "Georgia Scenes," a book of infinite humor, written by my venerated and revered preceptor, Hon. Augustus B. Longstreet; while a type of the more brutal class is given us in the character of Israel Meadows, of the celebrated Philemon Perch Papers, of which Col. Richard M. Johnston, now of Pen Lucy Academy, near Baltimore, is the author.

The State did not propose to make even these inferior schools free. I have already mentioned the fact that the sum of \$250,000 was set apart in 1821 as an academic fund. The same amount was appropri-

ated in the same statute for the education of the poor, which, added to a former appropriation of \$200,000 for the same purpose, made the sum of \$450,000. This large fund (large for that period) was invested and the annual proceeds, amounting to from \$20,000 to \$30,000, were devoted to the payment of the tuition of poor children. It was not the policy to establish separate schools for these indigent children. Such teachers of the academies and of the inferior schools that I have already sketched as were willing to submit to an examination, which was often a mere matter of form and conducted by incompetent examiners, were entitled, if approved, to receive their pro rata of the public fund for teaching any children adjudged by certain magistrates as belonging to the class known as "poor scholars," who may have entered their schools. I need not say to this audience that this so-called system had no system in it, that it was full of defects, and that it was lacking in a hundred of the elements that make up an efficient public school system. Still it answered a valuable purpose in its day. It placed the elements of an imperfect English education within reach of the entire white population, among whom the means of comfortable support were so general as to be well nigh universal. You will better understand this declaration when I tell you that I have spent my entire life in Georgia, and up to the late war I never met, to the best of my recollection, in city, town, village, or country place, a single southern born person asking alms. As to the comparatively small indigent class, what the State may have failed to do for them, the teachers would most gladly have done gratuitously, for, in whatever else they may have been lacking, they generally had kindly hearts.

The colored people, as is well known, we never sought to educate, and indeed the education of this class was finally prohibited by statute, under what I then believed the mistaken impression that this policy was necessary to our domestic security; and viewed from the standpoint of statesmanship alone, it cannot be shown that the State ought to have provided for the education of this class of the people. Education by the State rests upon the sole basis of self-protection. Under the constitution and laws as they then stood the colored people constituted no part of the body politic, and therefore it was no necessary part of statesmanship to provide for their education. Viewed from a moral and religious standpoint, the entire subject is seen in a different light. We are essentially a Christian people, and the belief that the Bible is a revelation from God may be said to be a national belief. Holding this opinion individually and believing that book to contain the only rule of faith and practice for the moral government of human beings, I always thought that no man should be denied intelligent access to it, and large numbers of my brethren at the South shared this conviction.

I have now put plainly before you the whole of educational endeavor in Georgia in ante-bellum times, both in its conception, as that conception found expression in the different constitutions and the laws, and in

its execution, as that execution is represented in the work actually done in the schools of both the higher and lower grades. In doing this I have put before you much more vividly than I could have done in any other way the ante-bellum educational work of the South; for what was done in Georgia is about the same as that which was accomplished in every other Southern State. In the name of my southern brethren I am willing to admit that our inferior schools were indeed *very inferior*, and that in this grade of work we were far behind the older States of the northern portion of the Union; and truth requires the further admission that, in the higher education, we were not the equals of the States that have given us a Harvard, a Yale, and a Princeton. Yet we were not so far behind in this higher grade of education as many persons have imagined, if we may judge from a single comparison, a comparison of the men in public life who were the products of this higher education in the two sections; for, as long as the truth of history is written, it will be recorded that the men of the South exerted a controlling influence in the national councils for more than half a century of our history.

EDUCATIONAL CHANGES EFFECTED BY THE WAR.

I come now to speak of the new era, the post-bellum period. It would be very difficult for me to put before you anything like an adequate view of the changes wrought by the war. No one, who was not of us, can ever be made to realize their magnitude. I think I may safely say that the history of civilization furnishes no parallel. Let us glance for a moment at some of them. A large portion of the population, in some of the States more than one-half, which had been held by the other under the constitution and laws as property and which made up the bulk of the wealth, was set free in a day. Millions of dollars' worth of other property was destroyed; and that which was left, including the real estate, had no exchangeable value, from the lack of purchasers. The entire currency of the country was blotted out, so that thousands of good citizens did not possess so much of current funds as would buy a meal's victuals or even pay the postage on a letter. The business of agriculture, always the main reliance of the people, was put in what seemed to be a hopeless condition by the derangement of the labor system and by the total inadequacy of the appliances of farming left on hand, such as farm animals, farm supplies, and agricultural implements. Thousands of persons living upon salaries or by the wages of labor, often without a week's subsistence on hand and having large families dependent upon them, were left without employment or the hope of obtaining it.

Great as were these changes in our material condition, they were not greater than the political changes to which we were subjected. At first we were told that we must make certain alterations in the fundamental law of the different States before these States could be restored to their former relations to the General Government. We had not been accus-

tomed to make changes in our organic law at the suggestion of an outside power, but we obeyed. We had not been long thus reconstructed till reconstruction was itself reconstructed. The new governments set up were as speedily pulled down, and we were required to form others. The law providing for the forming of these new governments, a law in the passage of which the South had no voice, enfranchised the recently liberated slaves—who were, as a rule, wholly illiterate—and disfranchised very large numbers of the most intelligent and virtuous of the white population, thus practically reversing, to a large extent, the relative status of the two races.

But it is with the effect of the changes of the war upon the progress of education in the South that I have to deal in this discussion. Most of the States of the South, in adopting new constitutions under the reconstruction acts, incorporated into the fundamental law the public school policy. I must say of the educational provisions of the constitution adopted at that time in my own State, that they were a great move forward. Notwithstanding the mass of ignorance which made up the great body of the convention, it was our good fortune that a few men of great ability and of true statesmanship had found their way into it; to these, doubtless, we owe the wise educational policy then adopted. Not only were constitutions which provide for public education generally adopted, but in every State in the South the attempt has been made to inaugurate a school system under laws passed in accordance with the new constitutional requirements. I propose now to refer briefly to some of the great obstacles that stood in the way of the success of this attempt. I have already referred, in a general way, to the utter wreck of material resources which the South had suffered. I will now give, not only the view of this wreck as presented in reliable statistics, but a further view from the same standpoint of the immense increase in the number of helpless illiterates to be provided for educationally in the new order of things. By the census of 1870, the entire property of the States of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia (Southern States) amounted to \$3,553,757,000; while the census of 1860 shows the same aggregate, at that time, to have been \$5,426,041,724. It will thus be seen that the value of all property in the fifteen States named was in 1870 only about three-fifths of such value in 1860. The population of these same fifteen States was in 1870 as follows: white, 9,275,856; colored, 4,472,684. It will thus be seen that nearly one-third of the people of these States, at that time, consisted of recently liberated slaves, owning little, if any, taxable property. Add to the number of freedmen the number of whites impoverished by the then recent war, and the number thus found destitute of material resources would, in all probability, equal one-half of the entire population.

By taking an area of less extent, I am enabled to make a much

stronger case. The aggregate value of property in the States of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas (cotton States) in 1870 was \$1,404,487,468; while the same aggregate in 1860 was \$3,294,241,406. The population of the States just named in 1870 was, white, 3,896,280; colored, 3,103,860, the colored population being nearly equal to the white. From these figures I feel justified in saying that, while the taxable property of these States was only about three-eighths of what it had been at the beginning of the preceding decade, the non-taxpayers must have been very nearly two-thirds of the entire population.

OBSTACLES TO BE OVERCOME IN EXTENDING ELEMENTARY EDUCATION.

I have now put before you, in the vast increase in the burden to be borne and the great diminution in ability to bear it, the greatest of the obstacles to success. There were others, however, to which I must briefly refer. From the sketch of educational achievement in the South in ante-bellum times given in the first part of this address, it will be seen that we had no such thing as public schools among us. Our people had a way of their own of accomplishing educational results, and in this way they were pretty firmly fixed, and, like all other communities where the controlling element is of Anglo-Saxon origin, they are very slow to make changes. This slowness to change is at the foundation of the conservatism everywhere prevailing in southern society, and, when not too persistent, it is an invaluable element of character.

But there was not only among the people a simple indisposition to change—there was a lack of the knowledge upon which rational change is always based. Few intelligent men among us had studied the philosophy upon which education by the State rests, its absolute necessity in order to self-protection, its greater universality, its cheapness, and consequent adaptation to an impoverished people, and its superiority as a result of intelligent supervision. These thoughts are now taking possession of the minds of thinking men, but till this result could be brought about it is very evident that no real progress could be made.

Another hindrance to success was not so much opposition to public schools as opposition to the manner in which the public school policy had been ingrafted upon the fundamental law.

I have already sketched the manner in which the new constitutions originated in the Southern States at the close of the war. It is only necessary to place the facts in this sketch before an audience of fair-minded citizens in any portion of the Union in order to enable them to understand how intelligent, virtuous, patriotic citizens could feel not only opposition but even aversion to a measure, intrinsically good, in consequence of the manner of its adoption. That this was the ground of much of the opposition, I know from intimate association and contact with all classes of citizens at the South.

I now approach another hindrance which has been much misunder-

stood, and which I am happy to have the opportunity of presenting in a truthful light before an audience like this. The hindrance to which I allude was the presence among us of so large an element of persons of African descent. It has been thought by many people at the North that the white people of the South entertain feelings of actual hostility toward this race of people. You will allow me to say, in all candor, that no greater mistake has ever been made. It is true that this feeling has prevailed to some extent among the more ignorant and illiberal of our white population; but the more intelligent and virtuous, constituting the bulk of our white citizens, are strangers to it. We understand this people too well and owe them too much to entertain feelings of hostility toward them. They nursed us in our infancy, were our playmates in childhood, and in manhood they were our domestics and field laborers. They watched over us in sickness, closed our eyes in death, and shed tears at our burial. During the four years of fratricidal strife, when the whole South was a military camp and every able-bodied white man a soldier, they cultivated our fields, protected our families, stood faithfully by us in the presence of armed foes, and wept with us over our brothers and our sons who fell in the deadly conflict. God forbid that we should ever forget the service they rendered us in the hour of our greatest trial! You will believe me, then, when I tell you that it was not hostility to this people that made their presence among us an obstacle to the successful introduction of public schools. I will endeavor to state clearly and briefly one or two of the grounds that made them a hindrance. I have already spoken of the general destruction of the property of the white population. Out of the remnant left them from the wreck very few of them were able to make adequate provision for the education of their own children. Is it surprising, then, that they should feel it a great hardship that they were required also to make provision for the education of the children of those who had themselves, by the laws of the country, constituted a large portion of their wealth? This feeling of hardship was one of the grounds of hindrance.

Another ground was a feeling of uncertainty in the minds of many intelligent men as to the probability of ever making good citizens out of the materials which this race furnishes. Even those among us who are now the strongest advocates of universal education understood this people too well to say that there was not reasonable ground for this doubt. We knew that, in all the history of the past, they had never accomplished anything great intellectually. They had never established anything like regularly organized governments, or enlarged the boundaries of knowledge by discovery, or made any valuable contributions to literature, or increased the productiveness of labor by useful inventions. In their own country they had always been mere savages; when brought here, notwithstanding their bondage, they were greatly raised in the scale of being. Contact with civilization and the labors among them of the different Christian churches did much for them; their

moral elevation was greatly retarded, however, by a general lack of anything like true home life among them. God, who made us and knows all that is in us, has appointed the family as the great agency for the moral and intellectual elevation of the race. While many humane masters were always ready voluntarily to make large pecuniary sacrifices rather than be guilty of the great wrong of breaking up families, the different Southern State governments made the great mistake of failing to extend over these home relations theegis of their protection. These causes had made the colored people what they were intellectually and morally, and their condition, in these respects, afforded, as I think, reasonable ground for the doubt entertained.

I am glad to say that these hindrances, so far as they rest upon long standing habits of thought, upon lack of information in respect to the new educational policy, upon the violent innovations on established modes of framing organic law, and upon speculations in reference to questions of race, have well nigh disappeared. The people of the South have consented to give up the old and try the new; they have studied the philosophy of the modern educational system, and many have studied with approval; they have dismissed speculative theories and have accepted what they now consider accomplished facts. The most convincing proof of these declarations is found in the fact that constitutions conforming to the new ideas are generally being adopted throughout the South by conventions in which men of the old school hold absolute sway, and an honest effort is being made everywhere throughout that entire section to educate all the children, irrespective of race. The greatest obstacle of all, that to which I first alluded and to which I now again refer, still remains, viz, our poverty and the vast number of the helpless thrown upon our hands. Out of this hard, stern fact grows the great, the overshadowing need of the South at this time, viz, more means. True, there are other needs. We need a deeper and more general public interest in education than can be excited among a partially educated population. We need a more intelligent comprehension of our educational situation than can be found among our rulers. We need a much larger and more enterprising body of thoroughly qualified teachers for both our white and colored schools, and especially for the latter. We need very much an adequate number of well endowed, well manned normal schools for keeping up this supply of well trained teachers. To these and similar topics the minds of some experienced educators would doubtless have turned in presenting my theme. But our need of means, the great, the ever present, the all pervading need, which for years past has been resting upon my mind, and blocking up the way to success in every grade of educational effort, whether in the college, the high school, the academy, or the common school, took possession of my mind when I entered upon this discussion; and I could not refrain from such a statement of historic and other facts and such a train of thought and argument as might enable me to bring out this one great need in all the weight of its overwhelming emphasis.

A few more thoughts now and this hour's work will be done. I have said that the people of the South are making an honest effort to educate the children of all classes, irrespective of race. I might have made that statement stronger. I might, with truth, have characterized the effort as heroic. Solomon says, "He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city;" if the spectacle of self-conquest in an individual is sublime, what shall we say of the spectacle when a whole people place themselves in that attitude? And this is the attitude of the South to-day. We have presented our shoulders to the burden placed upon them; but while we have been bearing this burden as best we could, in silence, we have felt, all the while, that it was not all ours. It was put upon us as a result of the war, and we feel that the whole country ought to aid us in bearing it. You are ready to ask, why refer to a topic like this in the presence of a body with no power to act? The men sitting here, and the thousands of intelligent men in all parts of the country whom they, in some sense, represent, can make themselves felt with a body that *is* potential. It is for this reason that I have touched upon this topic. Having now unburdened my heart of what I, in common with multitudes of the best men at the South, have long felt, I now leave the subject with you.

At the close of the prepared address, the speaker begged leave to make some additional statements. He said he regretted that he did not have the statistics from all the States of the South which verify the statement that these States are now making an earnest effort to educate the children of all classes. He desired, however, to give the Georgia statistics. Public schools were first put in operation, in that State, in 1871. In 1872 the school work was interrupted in consequence of a previous misapplication of the school fund. There have been enrolled in the schools in the successive years since the beginning of the work as follows:

Year.	White pupils.	Colored pupils.	Total.
1871	42, 914	6, 664	49, 578
1873	63, 922	19, 755	83, 677
1874	93, 167	42, 374	135, 541
1875	105, 990	50, 358	156, 348
1876	121, 418	57, 987	179, 405
1877	128, 296	62, 330	190, 626
1878	138, 000	73, 000	211, 000

In the cities, the schools are kept in operation for ten months of the year. In the rural districts, he regretted to say that they are kept open only for three months; and the school fund is so small as to be inadequate to pay all the expenses of even this short term.

